

# Wrap it up, state lawmakers; not much left to disagree on

Originally published June 6, 2015 at 4:02 pm Updated June 5, 2015 at 5:02 pm

**Lawmakers must meet in the middle on 2015-17 budget negotiations.**

By [Seattle Times editorial board](#)

*The Seattle Times*

STATE lawmakers are now six months into the 2015 legislative process. For those keeping track at home, that's a month and a half longer than scheduled. Gov. Jay Inslee has had to call the Legislature — stalled over negotiations to pass a 2015-17 budget — back for two overtime sessions.

Gridlock in the capital is now familiar for voters, but it carries actual costs: The overtime already has spurred school districts to begin preparing for layoffs should the government shut down when the new budget year starts July 1; it has jacked up the Legislature's costs by at least \$108,000, according to a partial accounting compiled last week by The News Tribune.

This second special session should end quickly because the points of contention have been whittled down from a pile of logs to a pile of straws. Currently, what the Republican-led state Senate and the Democratic-led state House are arguing over is a difference in spending of about \$600 million for the next two years.

To put that in context, either proposal would increase state spending at least \$4 billion from the current biennial budget, to about \$38 billion, and would make significant investments in basic education, higher education and mental-health care. Both budgets increase wages for state employees by nearly identical amounts.

A big sticking point in Olympia is whether the state needs an additional \$550 million in revenue, raised from a new capital-gains tax proposed by House Democrats. It would help pay for some good ideas, including a bigger investment in foster care, which has been under court oversight since 2004.

But the capital-gains tax is a non-starter with Senate Republican leaders — the Senate passed a bipartisan budget without it. If Democrats remain stuck on it, the prospects for a timely resolution are dim.

A path to the middle could include closure of some unjustified tax preferences, instead of the capital-gains tax. Washington's Swiss cheese tax code has plenty to pick from.

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The other big sticking point in Olympia is reform of Washington's inequitable education-funding system. The state Supreme Court, in its landmark 2012 McCleary decision, clearly ordered reform because school districts rely too much on local tax levies for basic education, which is a state duty.

Lawmakers are struggling to reach consensus on this complex and politically difficult task. Gov. Inslee has been an obstacle, rather than an asset, because he derided the so-called "levy swap" in his 2012 campaign.

He and the Legislature should have prioritized this necessary task two years ago. If this reform gets kicked down the road again, the state risks penalties from the Supreme Court, which already held the state in contempt last fall.

This legislative session was supposed to end in April. In 2013, the Legislature also went into double overtime , not wrapping up until June 29, with a government shutdown looming.

That deadline is just three weeks away. Wrap it up and go home, folks.

*Editorial board members are editorial page editor Kate Riley, Frank A. Blethen, Ryan Blethen, Brier Dudley, Mark Higgins, Jonathan Martin, Thanh Tan, Blanca Torres, William K. Blethen (emeritus) and Robert C. Blethen (emeritus).*